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Dutch Lawmaker Releases Anti-Quran Film

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By TOBY STERLING

The Associated Press

Thursday, March 27, 2008; 5:41 PM

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands -- A Dutch lawmaker released a film highly critical of Islam on Thursday, setting verses of the Muslim holy book against a background of violent images from terrorist attacks.

Geert Wilders posted his 15-minute film on a Web site. Shortly afterward, Dutch television channels showed segments of the film and broadcast discussions by analysts on the possible impact of its release..

The Dutch government had warned Wilders that a film offensive to Muslims could spark violent protests in Islamic countries, like those two years ago after European newspapers published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

"The film equates Islam with violence. We reject this," Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said in a televised reaction. "We ... regret that Mr. Wilders has released this film. We believe it serves no other purpose than to cause offense."

Dutch television refused to broadcast the film, and Wilders had difficulty finding an Internet platform willing to host it.

The film shows statements from radical clerics and cited verses from the Quran interspersed with images of the Sept. 11 attack on the United States, the 2004 commuter train bombings in Spain and the murder later that year of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh on an Amsterdam street.

His movie begins and ends with one of the caricatures of Muhammad, accompanied by the sound of a page being torn from a book.

Subtitles assure viewers that the page was not torn from a Quran, but from a telephone book. "It's not up to me, but the Muslims to tear the hate-sowing pages out of the Quran," the subtitles add.

After the release, Wilders told reporters that he made the film because "Islam and the Quran are dangers to the preservation of freedom in the Netherlands in the long term, and I have to warn people of that."

The film is called "Fitna," an Arabic word that can be translated as "ordeal." Wilders suggested European culture is under threat due to immigration by Muslims.

"It's five minutes before midnight and this is the last warning as far as I'm concerned," he said.

Early reaction was muted.

Yusuf Altuntas, of the Contact Group Muslims and Government, said Wilders "is seeking the limits, but not crossing the line. For Mr. Wilders, this is quite subtle."

The film was not as jarring as anticipated, said Maurits Berger, professor of Islam in the West at Leiden University.

"It's a series of images and photos, headlines from recent years which we already know," he said.

The film tells more about Wilders than the Quran, Berger said. "It represents his fear of Islam."

The lawmaker put out his film on the evening before a Dutch judge was due to hear a petition by a Muslim group seeking an independent review of the film to see whether it violates hate speech laws. The Dutch Islamic Federation asked the court to impose a fine of \$79,000 for every day the film is available to the public.

Mohamed Rabbae, chairman of the moderate National Moroccan Council, which appealed for calm in January ahead of the film's release, said he had heard about "Fitna" but not yet seen it.

Wilders "collected some bloody pictures and related them to some verses in the Quran," Rabbae told The Associated Press. "On the one hand, this is less bad than we thought he was going to do. But he also gives the impression the Quran justifies violence, and that is really wrong."

Associated Press writer Mike Corder in The Hague contributed to this reporter.

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